P251 / Policy Reform Without Institutional Consolidation: Political Disruption and Interrupted Development in the Post-Independence Global South

Topic : Policy Change/Continuity/Dynamics

Chair : Hamid Ali (Doha Institute for Graduate Studies)

Second Chair : Marwa Farag (Doha Institute for Graduate Studies)

Third Chair : Shahjahan Bhuiyan (American University in Cairo)

Fourth Chair : Tamer Qarmout (Doha Institute for Graduate Studies)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Panel Description

Since independence, many countries across the Global South have pursued ambitious economic, political, administrative, and institutional reforms aimed at accelerating development, strengthening state capacity, and overcoming colonial legacies. These initiatives have included national development plans, industrialization strategies, agricultural modernization, public-sector expansion, fiscal reforms, infrastructure investment, and efforts to build professional public administrations. Yet the development trajectories of many of these countries are frequently characterized as histories of persistent policy failure, institutional weakness, and economic underperformance.

Such interpretations often overlook an important distinction between policy reform, institutional progress, and development outcomes. The inability to achieve sustained economic growth or long-term institutional effectiveness does not necessarily imply that earlier reforms were poorly conceived, inadequately implemented, or entirely unsuccessful. In many cases, governments made measurable progress in expanding productive capacity, developing public institutions, improving infrastructure, and introducing administrative reforms. However, these achievements were subsequently interrupted, reversed, or undermined by political instability, military coups, civil conflicts, changes in political leadership, external economic shocks, and competing elite interests.

This panel advances the argument that interrupted development, rather than continuous policy failure, may provide a more accurate explanation of the post-independence experience of many countries in the Global South. It seeks to examine why promising episodes of reform and institutional development frequently failed to consolidate into durable economic and social outcomes.

The panel also challenges the assumption that developing countries necessarily lacked the institutional capacity or political commitment to initiate meaningful reforms. Instead, it invites closer examination of the political and institutional conditions that determine whether reform achievements survive changes in government, shifts in development strategies, and periods of economic or political crisis.

A central concern is the relationship between institutional continuity and political instability. Development policies often require sustained investment, administrative learning, policy coordination, and long-term political commitment. Yet institutions in many postcolonial states have operated within environments characterized by contested political authority, limited bureaucratic autonomy, patronage networks, and recurrent struggles over the distribution of public resources. Under such conditions, institutions may possess sufficient capacity to initiate reforms but lack the political protection, organizational autonomy, and institutional embeddedness necessary to sustain them.

The panel further considers how colonial institutional legacies, external dependencies, natural resource rents, international financial institutions, and global economic conditions have shaped the continuity or disruption of national development strategies. Particular attention will be given to the interaction between domestic political institutions and external pressures, including structural adjustment programs, debt crises, commodity-price volatility, and geopolitical interventions.

Rather than treating development as a linear progression from reform to successful outcomes, the panel encourages historical and comparative approaches that identify distinct episodes of policy initiation, institutional expansion, political disruption, reform reversal, and attempted reconstruction. This perspective allows researchers to distinguish between the original effectiveness of a reform, the institutional conditions necessary for its survival, and the long-term consequences of repeated disruption.

Key Questions

The panel welcomes theoretical, empirical, historical, and comparative contributions addressing questions such as:

Policy progress versus development outcomes: How can researchers distinguish genuine policy and institutional progress from long-term development outcomes? Under what conditions might reforms initially succeed but subsequently fail to produce lasting results?
Political instability and institutional continuity: How do military coups, regime changes, civil conflicts, political exclusion, and elite competition interrupt development strategies and undermine institutional learning?
Colonial legacies and institutional fragility: To what extent have colonial administrative structures constrained institutional consolidation and the continuity of post-independence development policies?
Economic reform and external dependency: How have foreign borrowing, structural adjustment, international financial institutions, natural resource dependence, and external economic shocks contributed to reform reversals or interrupted development?
State capacity and reform sustainability: Why are some states capable of initiating ambitious development programs but unable to sustain them? What roles do bureaucratic autonomy, political accountability, institutional legitimacy, and administrative professionalism play?
Comparative development trajectories: Why have some countries managed to protect reform achievements across political transitions while others have experienced repeated cycles of institutional expansion and collapse?
Policy implications: What institutional arrangements and political conditions can protect development policies from political disruption? How should reform sequencing, institution-building, and long-term development planning be reconsidered?

Scope and Contributions

We invite papers examining experiences from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and other regions of the Global South. Contributions may focus on individual countries, comparative case studies, cross-national quantitative analysis, or historical institutional approaches.

Particularly welcome are studies using longitudinal evidence on economic growth, fiscal balances, public investment, industrial development, state capacity, governance indicators, political instability, and institutional performance. Papers that trace policy reforms across successive political regimes, identify critical moments of institutional disruption, or compare countries with contrasting reform trajectories are especially encouraged.

We also welcome contributions that engage critically with established explanations of development failure, including institutionalist theories, the political economy of reform, historical institutionalism, state-capacity approaches, dependency theory, and the political economy of conflict.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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political and institutional conditions that determine whether reform achievements survive changes in government, shifts in development strategies, and periods of economic or political crisis.

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Expected Contribution

The panel seeks to move beyond the conventional question of why reforms fail and toward a more historically grounded question: Why do development achievements that emerge under one political or institutional arrangement so frequently fail to survive subsequent political transitions?

By distinguishing the initiation of reforms from their institutional consolidation and long-term outcomes, the panel aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of development trajectories in the Global South.

Ultimately, the panel seeks to identify the institutional, political, and economic conditions under which reform

progress can become durable development. Its broader objective is to inform debates on state-building, institutional resilience, development planning, and the design of policies capable of surviving political instability and structural economic shocks.